

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 PM-04

H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

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R 171835Z JUN 77

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8869

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SANA

USMISSION USUN

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 8762

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, UR, SO, ET

SUBJECT: SOVIET MFA OFFICAL DISCUSSES RED SEA REGION DEVELOPMENTS

SUMMARY: SOVIET MFA OFFICIAL DESCRIBES SOVIET POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN RED SEA REGION. HE EMPHASIZES ECONOMIC ASPECT OF RELATIONS WITH ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA, CLAIMS THAT MOSCOW HAS COUNSELED PMAC TO NEGOTIATE A POLITICAL SOLUTION WITH ERITREANS, AND TRIES TO DOWNPLAY SOMALI MILITARY THREAT. SOME LIGHT IS SHED ON RECENT VISIT TO MOSCOW OF SOMALI FIRST V.P. ALI SAMANTAR. END SUMMARY.

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1. ON JUNE 15, AFTER FOUR MONTHS OF CONTINUOUS EFFORT, EMBOFF HAD LONG CONVERSATION WITH MFA THIRD AFRICAN DEPT. SECTOR CHIEF FOR HORN OF AFRICA (ETHIOPIA, SOMALIA, DJIBOUTI), COUNSELOR L. D. MIRONOV. HIGHLIGHTS OF MIRONOV REMARKS ARE SUMMARIZED BELOW (REMARKS ON DJIBOUTI TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY HAVE BEEN SENT SEPTEL).

2. ETHIOPIA. VISIT OF PMAC LEADER MENGISTU IN EARLY MAY AND DOCUMENTS SIGNED AT THAT TIME MARK QUALITATIVE CHANGE IN SOVIET-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONSHIP. WHILE THERE IS AN EMPHASIS IN CURRENT STAGE OF RELATIONSHIP ON ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, THIS IS NOT AN EASY MATTER DUE TO DIFFICULTY IN DECIDING HOW SOVIET CONTRIBUTION CAN HAVE MAXIMUM IMPACT, LACK OF ETHIOPIAN CADRE, AND ETHIOPIAN TRADITIONAL TRADE ORIENTATION TOWARD WEST. HOWEVER, SOVIETS DO NOT WANT TO UPSET THIS TRADE ORIENTATION SINCE IT ENABLES ETHIOPIA TO PAY FOR SOVIET ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE WITH HARD CURRENCY.

3. AS FAR AS MILITARY ASSISTANCE GOES, ONLY SMALL ARMS AND AMMUNITION WERE SENT ORIGINALLY TO HELP PMAC DEFEND REVOLUTION AGAINST ITS ENEMIES. HEAVIER, MORE SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS SUCH AS TANKS, PLANES (SIC) AND ARTILLERY HAVE BEEN SENT ONLY IN RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL THREAT FROM SUDAN. PMAC IS NOT WAGING MILITARY ACTION AGAINST SEPARATISTS, BUT IS HOLDING STRONG POINTS AGAINST SEPARATIST ATTACKS.

4. WITH REGARD TO ERITREAN SEPARATISTS, SOVIETS BELIEVE AND HAVE SO COUNSELED PMAC THAT A NEGOTIATED POLITICAL SOLUTION SHOULD BE REACHED WHICH WOULD RESULT IN SOME SORT OF AUTONOMY WITHIN FEDERAL FRAMEWORK, E.G., SOMETHING LIKE KURDISH AUTONOMOUS REGION IN IRAQ. A MAJOR PROBLEM IS THAT THERE ARE MANY

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SEPARATIST MOVEMENTS AND NOT JUST ONE. THE IMMEDIATE THREAT, HOWEVER, IS FROM SUDAN, HENCE THE TASS STATEMENT OF JUNE 6 WHICH WAS NOT - EVEN IMPLICITLY - DIRECTED AGAINST SOMALIA. IT CAN BE SAID THAT THE RECENT ATTACKS ON THE ADDIS ABABA-DJIBOUTI RAILWAY BY SOMALI GUERRILLAS REPRESENT A FORM OF MILITARY PRESSURE BY SOMALI. BUT THE SOMALI GOVERNMENT HAS NOT ADMITTED ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THESE ATTACKS AND MILITARY "PRESSURE" IS DIFFERENT FROM THE OPEN THREAT FACED BY ETHIOPIA FROM THE SUDAN.

5. SOMALIA. EARLY JUNE VISIT OF FIRST V. P. ALI SAMANTAR DID CONCENTRATE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RED SEA REGION, BUT ALSO HAD EMPHASIS ON SOVIET-SOMALI ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP (FOR EXAMPLE, SOMALI MINISTER OF FISHING WAS MEMBER OF DELEGATION) AND ON SITUATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. AS INDICATED BY PARTICIPATING IN TALKS OF PARTY SECRETARY PONOMAREV, INTER-PARTY TIES WERE ALSO DISCUSSED. SOVIET SIDE

EXPLAINED ITS POLITY WITH REGARD TO ETHIOPIA AND WARNED OF "IMPERIALIST AND REACTIONARY" EFFORTS TO CREATE TENSION IN RED SEA REGION. TA'IZ SUMMIT WAS NOT SPECIFICALLY DISCUSSED BUT SOVIETS DID EXPRESS CONCERN OVER IMPLICATIONS OF A RED SEA SECURITY ZONE (I.E., ONE WITHOUT ETHIOPIA) INCLUDING THE THREAT TO SUEZ CANAL AND RED SEA SHIPPING. THE U.S. SHOULD ALSO BE CONCERNED OVER THIS LATTER ISSUE NOT ONLY FROM THE STANDPOINT OF ITS INTERESTS, BUT ALSO WITH AN EYE ON FREE TRANSIT FOR ISRAELI SHIPS.

6. IT IS TRUE THAT THE SOVIET UNION HAS A GOOD AND CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH SOMALIA, BUT THE WEST SHOULD NOT FEAR SOVIET INFLUENCE ON SIAD BARRE AND SHOULD NOT OVERESTIMATE IT. SIAD BARRE IS TRYING TO BUILD A PROGRESSIVE REGIME BUT THERE ARE MAJOR PROBLEMS, E.G., THE ECONOMIC BASE FOR THIS IS VERY CONFIDENTIAL

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THIN (ALTHOUGH IMPROVING, I.E., AN ESTIMATED 80 PERCENT OF PRODUCTION IS IN STATE SECTOR). IN ADDITION SOMALIA'S TERRITORIAL CLAIMS ON ETHIOPIA AND KENYA WHICH PREDATE THE PRESENT REGIME AND HAVE BEEN ADOPTED BY ITS PREOCCUPY THE SOMALIS AND DIRECT THEIR ATTENTION AWAY FROM URGENT TASKS OF SELF DEVELOPMENT.

7. COMMENT: ADDITIONAL DETAILS ON ABOVE TOPIS WILL BE REPORTED BY AIRGRAM. MIRONOV COMMENTS SHOULD, OF COURSE BE TAKEN WITH MORE THAN GRAIN OF SALT, BUT PROVIDE SOME INSIGHT IN THE WAY SOVIETS WOULD LIKE US TO VIEW THEIR ROLE IN RED SEA REGION. MIRONOV GAVE IMPRESSION THAT SOVIETS HAVE HAD DIFFICULTY IN STAYING ON TOP OF TURBULENT EVENTS IN REGION DURING PAST FOUR MONTHS, BUT THAT SOME PROGRESS HAD BEEN MADE IN KEEPING SOMALIA IN FOLD. IN THIS REGARD HE APPROVINGLY CITED BREZHNEV-SAMANTAR MEETING AND SIAD BARRE'S RECENT REMARKS TO SOMALIA MFA WORKERS ON IMPORTANCE OF SOVIET-SOMALI RELATIONS.
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